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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NUPENG JOINS DEPARTMENT OF PETROLEUM  
RESOURCES STRIKE AS TALKS BEGIN

REF: (A) LAGOS 332, (B) LAGOS 344

1. (U) As part of a solidarity agreement between the two major oil workers' unions, members of the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) branch of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) joined a strike organized by DPR members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN). Despite the walkout by approximately 600 NUPENG members employed by DPR, NUPENG General Secretary Joseph Akinlaja said there are no plans to call for a union-wide national strike, adding that NUPENG is "not interested in punishing people over government negligence."

2. (U) Two separate meetings were held on Wednesday, February 19, to discuss issues involving unpaid salaries and DPR autonomy. In Lagos, DPR Director Macaulay Ofurhie met with workers and promised to pay all wages and allowances outstanding before the end of February. However, discussions in Abuja between PENGASSAN and GON officials regarding DPR autonomy remain deadlocked. NUPENG will join the discussions when talks resume on Thursday, February 20. Labor and Productivity Minister, Alhaji Musa Gwadabe, and Special Presidential Advisor on Petroleum, Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman, will head the GON delegation at Thursday's meeting.

3. (U) PENGASSAN insists that the strike will continue until the National Assembly moves forward with legislation granting autonomy to DPR. If Thursday's talks fail, hope of an early resolution could rest on Friday's meeting between PENGASSAN and the Petroleum and Energy Committee of the National Assembly. General Secretary of PENGASSAN, Kenneth Narebor, told journalists yesterday that Friday's meeting will determine future action. He said the union "cannot just call off the strike without any meaningful achievement, because we are not ready to embark on the process again". Narebor said PENGASSAN has decided to suspend further actions "that will escalate the already tensed situation until Friday's meeting with the National Assembly Committee on Energy."

4. (U) Comment: Although the GON will probably fall short on PENGASSAN's demands, the National Assembly will probably accelerate its review of DPR's demand for autonomy. DPR's promise to pay outstanding salaries and a "good faith" effort by the National Assembly to consider autonomy could end the work stoppage. However, PENGASSAN's reluctance to request that its entire membership join in a sympathy strike despite an expired 72-hour ultimatum, demonstrates the union's reported efforts to resolve the dispute without creating a major industry-wide crisis. U.S. oil companies have reported no reduction in operations stemming from the strike. One source said his company has met all scheduled loadings for its crude oil exports since the beginning of the DPR walkout, and a relatively small-volume operator also reports no disruption in processing whatsoever. End Comment.

HINSON-JONES